

Acts

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

The Sign And The Sermon

October 2nd, 2022

Acts 3:1-26

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 3. As I mentioned last Sunday, we will now be observing “stage 1” of the assignment that Jesus gave to his disciples before he ascended to heaven. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told them:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, (Acts 1:8a)

That promise was fulfilled in Pentecost, which we saw in chapters 1 and 2. The church is now filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered for the mission which Jesus will go on to describe in four stages:

and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8b)

Our passage this morning begins to recount how the Apostles engaged with stage 1 of that assignment – the witness to Jerusalem.

As we turn now to chapter 3, we will find Peter and John making their way to the temple for their daily prayers. As a brief aside – I want to point out that the fireworks of Pentecost were followed by the ordinary routine of daily prayer. If you’ve ever experienced a powerful move of God’s Spirit, you know that it can be easy to become addicted to the unusual and the occasional. But the disciples set a good example for us here. They don’t go back to the upper room pleading with God

to repeat their favourite past experiences. Instead, they make their way to the temple for the 3 PM prayer time – an ordinary prayer meeting.

God meets us in the extraordinary, but as we will see here, He also meets us in the ordinary. Never despise the small things.

We have a lot of ground to cover this morning, so we're going to consider this text in two sections. In Acts chapter 3, we find a sign and a sermon. Let's begin our time considering the sign.

The Sign

Look with me now to verses 1-10:

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. ³ Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. ⁴ And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1-10 ESV)

Now, before we zoom in on the details of this story, I want to make a big picture observation: The inbreaking of the kingdom of God is often accompanied by supernatural fireworks! We are going to see this time and time again in the Book of Acts. God often uses signs and wonders to GRIP the attention of a people and to VALIDATE the proclamation of the gospel. We saw that at Pentecost. We see it here, as the kingdom is about to be proclaimed in Jerusalem. We will see it as the kingdom advances to Judea, and to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. We continue to see it in the modern world as reports often come back from the mission field of signs and wonders going before those who bring the gospel to unreached peoples. Now, we are going to spend more time discussing signs, wonders when we get to chapter 5, but I simply want to make this one big picture

observation this morning: The inbreaking of the kingdom of God is often accompanied by supernatural fireworks. So, let's turn our attention now to this amazing miracle and let's consider the details of this story.

This man sat at the Beautiful Gate everyday asking for alms. Can you imagine the excitement when he burst into the temple LEAPING and praising God?! This sign filled everyone in the temple with awe and wonder, and it primed the pump for Peter to preach a powerful sermon! But before we jump ahead to the sermon, I want to draw your attention to some of the details in this incredible story. First, we find a broken man.

1. A broken man

Here is a man who was born into powerlessness. The text tells us that he was "lame from birth." Day after day he was carried to a gate where he would sit and beg for alms. Day after day worshippers walked past him as they made their way into the temple. Day after day, he sat at the gate – strategically positioned to receive small tokens of mercy from the crowd.

Forever outside. Begging for pennies.

I can't help but see in this broken man a portrait of humanity apart from Christ.

Like him, we were all born into powerlessness. Listen to the way that the Bible describes our condition apart from Jesus:

"None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ **no one understands;**

no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become **worthless;**

no one does good,

not even one." (Romans 3:10b-12 ESV)

They are **darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God** because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. (Ephesians 4:18 ESV)

remember that **you were at that time separated from Christ**, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world.** (Ephesians 2:12 ESV)

And you were **dead in the trespasses and sins** (Ephesians 2:1 ESV)

Worthless. Alienated. Hopeless. Dead. That is our condition apart from Jesus. Because of the sin of Adam, we are born into a problem that we are powerless to solve by ourselves.

And, because of our condition, we are unable to enjoy the presence and the glory of God. Apart from Christ, we are all like this man – forever sentenced to beg at the gate, but never able to enter the temple. Perhaps there are even some people with us this morning who are feeling this separation right now. You watch as people worship all around you, but for you there is a distance – there is a chasm – that you cannot bridge. Perhaps, like the man in this story, you have spent your **WHOLE LIFE** on the outside looking in.

In this broken man, we see an illustration of the world apart from Jesus – born into ruin, separated from God, and begging for scraps. But, praise God, we also see:

2. A compassionate response

Peter and John were on their way to the temple to worship when they heard a voice calling out for alms. They stopped and turned their attention to the man. Verse 4 says:

And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” (Acts 3:4 ESV)

On any given day, hundreds – if not thousands – of people walked past this man on their way to the temple. Those who pitied him would have gone through the motions of dropping a coin into his hands as they continued on their way. Like beggars today, he would have almost certainly kept his head down and avoided eye contact as best as he could. His was an embarrassing position.

What a surprise it must have been then to hear that call: “Look at us.”

So he looked up – perhaps expecting to be mocked or judged – yet he saw eyes that looked upon him with compassion. He saw eyes that saw him – not as a beggar, nor as an embarrassment, but as a man created in the image of God. As the great preacher G. Campbell Morgan notes here:

Peter looked, and through the eyes of Peter there flashed the love of the Christ.¹

Oh, that the world would see the love of Jesus in our eyes!

In 2 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul describes us as “ambassadors of Christ.” The job of an ambassador is simply this – to faithfully represent the one who sent him. Our CHIEF ASSIGNMENT, then, is to *resemble* Jesus to the world.

And that is surely what Peter and John are doing here. They had a front row seat for Jesus’ earthly ministry; therefore they KNEW how much their Savior cared about the weak, the sick, and the vulnerable. They saw the mercy in his eyes when he spoke healing to the woman who was seen as “unclean” because she couldn’t stop bleeding. They marveled as Jesus entered the leper colonies and laid his hands on those who were considered “untouchable.” They were with him when he crossed over the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a storm and hiked into an area that was ceremonially unclean all so that he could set ONE MAN FREE from demon oppression!

That was Jesus. That IS Jesus!

Jesus never stands at a distance. Jesus enters in! None of us would be here this morning if he didn’t. He is the God who draws near! Amen?!

And we are his ambassadors.

I’m going to quote G. Campbell Morgan one more time because he is so helpful here. He writes:

The Church standing afar off, and singing a song which she hopes will reach the dweller in the valley does but mock the need of the dweller in the valley. The Church that comes down to the side of the wounded, weary, woebegone world, and holds out the right hand,

¹ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 101.

and lifts, is the Church through which the Christ is doing His own work, through which the Christ will win His ultimate victory.²

Church, I confess that I often miss the mark here. Particularly over this last year, I've been convicted of my sin in this area. It is easier to avoid the mess. It is safer to stand at a distance. And, when I am not actively seeking the Lord's help in this, I gravitate towards *easy and safe* like a moth to the flame.

But Jesus hasn't called us to easy! Do we believe that? Nor has he called us to safe. Let us increasingly become the church that enters in, that stoops down, and that lifts up. O that the world would see the love of Christ in our eyes!

Third, and most importantly, in this sign we see:

3. A powerful Saviour

To be clear, Peter and John are not the saviours in this story. They were careful to ensure that no one should ascribe the power to them. When they addressed the crowd, they asked:

why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?
(Acts 1:12b ESV)

What we see here, and what we will see throughout the rest of this Book is NOT the power of the Apostles. What we are seeing is the power of JESUS on display *in and through* the Apostles.

With compassion in his eyes, Peter looked at this man and declared:

“I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (Acts 3:6 ESV)

The people passing by were probably tempted to laugh out loud at this point. This man was a common fixture at the temple. He had been lame for a lifetime! Who does Peter think he is? But we read:

² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 104.

immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. (Acts 1:7b-8 ESV)

Muscles developed in an INSTANT! All of the memory and coordination required to learn how to walk was downloaded into this man's body IMMEDIATELY. He stood! He walked! He LEAPT his way into the temple, and he praised God all along the way! There is POWER in the name of Jesus! Amen?

Power to heal! Power to give life! Power to transform your heart! Power to break your addiction! Power to change your desires! Power to restore your marriage! Power to overcome unbelief!

There is POWER in the name of Jesus!

But let's take a moment to make sure that we understand what we're saying here. We are not suggesting that simply uttering Jesus' name produces powerful results – like a Christianized version of “Abracadabra!” No! We're not saying that.

What ARE we saying, then? To pray or to speak in Jesus' name is to pray or speak in HIS AUTHORITY. Here's an illustration: If you noticed after the service that my one of my kids was taking a basketball outside to play, you could then speak to my children in my name and say: “Your dad says to put that basketball away!”

However, that only works if you've spoken to ME first. Perhaps I told them to go play with that basketball. You can only speak to them in my name and with my authority if you know my will. In Acts 19, for example, some men got really excited about signs and wonders and tried using Jesus' name as a magic word to cast out demons. Do you remember how that story ended? The demon possessed man turned to them and said:

“Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, **but who are you?**” ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. (Acts 19:15b-16 ESV)

When I pray “in Jesus' name” what I am saying is, “God, I am asking for this, but I'm not asking on my own authority. What right do I have to make *any* request of You? I was a sinner who fell

short of Your glory. I was a rebel who rejected You. I have no right in and of myself to approach Your throne. But JESUS DOES! Jesus is righteous, and holy, and he is seated at Your right hand. Therefore, I'm bringing this to you in Jesus' name – not my own. If this is in alignment with his will – and I believe it is – then let it be.”

The disciples knew that it was God's will to heal this man and so they declared in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth “Stand up and walk!” And through the power of Jesus, he did just that.

This amazing sign drew a crowd. And as was the case when the crowd assembled after Pentecost, Peter took this opportunity to address the crowd and to share with them the meaning behind the sign. Look with me now at verses 11-26 as we turn our attention away from the sign and towards the sermon:

The Sermon

We read:

¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

¹⁷ “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. ²² Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.’ ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ ²⁴ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to

Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ ²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” (Acts 3:11-26 ESV)

Now, there is a great deal of overlap with *this sermon* and the sermon that Peter preached at Pentecost. That gives us an opportunity this morning to move rather quickly as we zoom out and observe two major themes.

Remember, this sermon was *preached in the temple* in Jerusalem, and it was *addressed to the “men of Israel.”* Peter is addressing the people of promise! He’s preaching to the biological children of Abraham. And he begins his sermon with an announcement:

1. An announcement

In this sermon, Peter ascribes numerous titles to Jesus that would have SHOCKED the Jews who were listening! He announces Jesus as the Christ. That title – Christ – was a short form way of saying “the King in the line of David that we’ve been waiting for.” The Israelites were LONGING for the Messiah – the one who would lead them to victory – the one who set them free from their captors! Peter addresses the crowd here and says, “This is him!”

He also announces Jesus as the servant of God. That title was a short form way of alluding to the suffering servant that the prophet Isaiah pointed forward to – an innocent servant who would deliver his people by suffering for their sins. Isaiah said of this servant:

Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted. (Isaiah 52:13 ESV)

That verse – that expectation – must have been ringing out in Peter’s mind when he declared in verse 13:

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, **glorified his servant Jesus** (Acts 3:13a ESV)

“Brothers and sisters! He is the servant of God, and he is high and lifted up – glorified by the Father – just like the prophet said!”

He goes on to announce Jesus as the seed of Abraham – an allusion to Genesis 22 where God promises that He will bless the nations through Abraham’s offspring. Peter points at Jesus and says, “This is the seed through whom all of the blessings of God will be made available to the world!”

He also announces him as the Author of life and the Holy and Righteous one! He picks up ALL of these Old Testament prophecies and promises and he connects all the dots to this one man – Jesus!

I want to highlight one more title that Peter ascribes to Jesus – a title that would have been particularly shocking for his Jewish audience. Look again at verse 22:

Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. (Acts 3:22 ESV)

Peter is quoting here from Deuteronomy 18, and he is announcing that Jesus is the prophet like Moses. He is the new Law giver. And, in making this announcement, Peter is forcing the crowd to a place of decision. If Jesus IS the prophet like Moses – if he IS the one that the prophets pointed forward to – then obedience is not optional. That’s what the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 declared. Peter quotes it in the very next verse:

²³ And it shall be that **every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed** from the people.’ (Acts 3:23 ESV)

Peter is standing in the temple in Jerusalem and saying, “If you are truly the people of God – if you are truly the children of the covenant – then you CANNOT GO ON IGNORING WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN!”

In this announcement, Peter told the congregation the truth about Jesus, and he told them the truth about their sin. He looked out over the assembly and announced:

But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. (Acts 3:14-15a ESV)

Not only did they fail to listen to the prophet like Moses... They MURDERED him!

As Peter preached this sermon, I suspect that there were people in the crowd who felt so far beyond the reach of grace that they could barely lift their eyes. But, following the announcement, Peter issued an invitation:

2. An invitation

The conviction of sin fell upon the assembly. But Peter didn't leave them wallowing in hopelessness. Look at the tenderness that he shows towards them in verse 17:

¹⁷“And now, brothers, **I know that you acted in ignorance**, as did also your rulers. (Acts 3:17 ESV)

Peter is echoing the prayer here that Jesus prayed from the cross:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34a ESV)

There is forgiveness even for the men who drove the nails into Jesus' hands and feet! There is forgiveness for the men and women in Jerusalem who failed to recognize their Saviour when he stood right before their eyes!

And there is forgiveness for you.

You were blind to His goodness. You were deaf to God's voice. You were dead in your sin.

But now – now He has opened your eyes to see! And seeing, you are broken by your sin.

That's good. That's where we need to be if we're going to receive God's mercy. Broken. That's where this crowd was. But they didn't stay in that place.

Peter looked out over that crowd of broken, guilty men and women, and he gave this invitation:

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, (Acts 3:19-20a ESV)

“If you turn,” Peter says, “If you repent; if you confess your sin and align and submit yourself to Jesus – the Christ, the prophet like Moses, the seed of Abraham, the suffering Servant, the Author of life, the Holy and Righteous One – then your sins will be **BLOTTED OUT!**”

What a glorious promise! Here is a people who knew Jesus face to face and who mocked him, whipped him, spat upon him, stripped him naked and nailed him to a tree!

How hard are they going to have to work to erase that record? How long until that debt is settled?

Peter says, “God is ready to erase that record **RIGHT NOW!** Repent and turn to Jesus and your sins will be **BLOTTED OUT!** Today! Gone! As far as the east is from the west! Erased! Forgiven! Forever!”

What a scandal! Honestly, how do we even begin to wrap our minds around this?! Our God gives His grace to people who could never, ever, **EVER** earn it! People like me. People like you. Have you done some horrible things? Are there some skeletons in your closet that make you sick when you think of them? Do you feel like you’re outside of the reach of grace? Listen to me this morning: **JESUS PRAYED FOR THE MEN WHO SWUNG THE HAMMER!** Then, he commanded his church to go **BACK INTO JERUSALEM** where he was rejected and crucified and to offer them the invitation of the gospel **FIRST!** That’s what we see in verse 26:

God, having raised up his servant, **sent him to you first** (Acts 3:26a ESV)

“**START HERE!**” God says. “Extend my offer of mercy and forgiveness to the world, but start **HERE** in the place where the rebellion and the mutiny reached its climax.”

I want you to see this today: God doesn’t write people off the way that we do.

His commitment to grace is stronger than our commitment to sin.

His love is stronger than our rebellion.

As the puritan Richard Sibbes once said:

There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.³

Therefore, for as long as there is breath in our lungs, none of us are too far gone. So – even after a lifetime of rebellion – the invitation remains. Even if you’ve rejected Jesus and thumbed your nose at him for 80 years, his mercy is MORE!

Repent and turn, that your sins may be blotted out.

And when we turn to Him, God gives us more than a clean slate. He gives us LIFE! Look again at the invitation:

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, (Acts 3:19-20a ESV)

Peter is surely alluding here to Isaiah the promise of 35:6. Isaiah was given a glimpse of a coming day of refreshment, and he described it this way:

then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert; (Isaiah 35:6 ESV)

As God healed that lame man and caused him to leap into the temple, he was setting off FIREWORKS to demonstrate that the time of refreshing was breaking through! The lame man leaps! The mute sing for joy! And the hard, arid places come to life as they are saturated with living water! The kingdom of God is breaking into this world, and it is gloriously good news!

I don’t know if we will ever witness a lame man leaping in this place, but I will tell you that we are surrounded by miracles. Spiritually dead people are coming to life all around us! Marriages that were lame from the beginning are now standing and even leaping! Hearts that were consumed

³ Richard Sibbes as quoted by R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Prayer That Turns The World Upside Down*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2018), 89.

with affection for sin have become hearts that long for the things of God! Addictions are losing their power! Idols are falling to the floor! Christ is being exalted! There is POWER in the name of Jesus!

¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, (Acts 3:19-20a ESV)

The times of refreshing are here.

Repent. Turn. Live.

Let's pray together.